

Serial No. 10/706,394

Amendments to the Claims

Claims 1-30 (Canceled).

31. (currently amended) A method of converting sheet material into a dunnage product, comprising the steps of:

advancing the sheet material from a supply thereof; and

during such advancing, shaping the sheet material into a continuous strip of dunnage having a three-dimensional shape using a forming assembly; and

advancing the sheet material through the forming assembly using a pulling assembly positioned downstream from the forming assembly;

wherein the step of advancing the sheet material includes moving grippers together a gripper through a transfer region in transverse opposition to ~~one~~ another gripper, the grippers cooperating with one another to cooperatively grip therebetween the dunnage strip and advance the dunnage strip through the transfer region, while gathering and laterally capturing the dunnage strip using within an aperture in at least one of the grippers as the grippers are moved through the transfer region, and wherein the transversely opposed grippers transversely overlap one another while advancing the dunnage strip.

32. (currently amended) The method as set forth in claim 31, wherein ~~the step of capturing the strip of dunnage between the opposing~~ the transversely opposed grippers ~~includes deforming~~ deform opposite sides of the strip of dunnage in the transfer region.

33. (currently amended) The method as set forth in claim 31, wherein ~~the step of moving the grippers together includes moving~~ the grippers move through the transfer region in longitudinally offset yet paired relation for gripping and advancing the strip of dunnage.

34. (cancelled)

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35. (currently amended) The method as set forth in claim 31, wherein the grippers are arranged in transversely opposed sets of grippers disposed on opposite transverse sides of the transfer region, and ~~the step of moving the grippers includes progressively moving the grippers~~ are progressively moved towards one another at an upstream end of the transfer region and ~~are progressively moving the grippers~~ moved away from one another at a downstream end of the transfer region.

36. (currently amended) The method as set forth in claim 31, wherein the ~~pulling assembly further includes a set of transfer assemblies having connected thereto the respective sets of grippers, and the step of moving the grippers includes using the transfer assemblies~~ are used to move the grippers toward each other at the upstream end of the transfer region to transversely engage the strip of dunnage and away from each other at the downstream end of the transfer region to release the strip of dunnage.

37. (currently amended) The method as set forth in claim 36, wherein the ~~step of moving the transversely opposed grippers includes moving the grippers~~ are moved along a non-circular path in opposite relation to one another and, ~~as the grippers move along the non-circular path in opposing relation, sequentially transversely engaging the strip of dunnage therebetween on opposite sides thereof for advancing therewith the strip of dunnage.~~

38. (cancelled)

39. (cancelled)

40. (previously presented) The method as set forth in claim 36, including the step of synchronizing movement of the transfer assemblies.

41. (currently amended) The method as set forth in claim 31, wherein the ~~step of using the forming assembly includes guiding the strip of dunnage~~ the sheet

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stock material is passed through a constriction member at an upstream end of the forming assembly thereby guiding the strip of dunnage from a downstream end of the forming assembly to an engagement region between the opposing sets of transversely opposed grippers for effecting the step of shaping of the sheet material into the continuous strip of dunnage having a three-dimensional shape.

42. (currently amended) The method as set forth in claim 31, wherein the transversely opposed grippers are arranged in transversely opposed first and second sets of grippers connected to respective first and second gripper carriages disposed on opposite transverse sides of the transfer region; and
— ~~wherein the step of advancing the sheet material includes moving longitudinally the first set of grippers along a first non-circular path and moving longitudinally the second set of grippers in synchronous relation to the movement in the first set of grippers along a second non-circular path; and~~
— ~~wherein portions of the first and second paths are juxtaposed to define therebetween the transfer region and wherein the step of advancing the sheet material further includes transversely engaging the strip of dunnage on opposite sides thereof between at least one gripper of the first set of grippers and moving at least one gripper of the second set of grippers for advancing the strip of dunnage through the transfer region.~~

43. (previously presented) The method as set forth in claim 42, wherein the gripper carriages are mounted for rotation about respective axes that are parallel to one another ~~step of advancing the sheet material by moving the grippers through the transfer region which has an engagement region whereat the first and second non-circular paths converge toward one another, an advancement region whereat the first and second non-circular paths are substantially parallel to one another, and a release region whereat the first and second non-circular paths diverge away from one another.~~

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Claims 44-64 (canceled).

65. (new) A method of converting sheet material into a dunnage product, comprising the steps of:

moving at least one gripper through a transfer region in transverse opposition to another gripper; and

laterally and transversely gathering and capturing the sheet material in a gap bounded by respective portions of the transversely opposed grippers, wherein the transversely opposed grippers transversely overlap one another and have respective shapes that cooperate to capture the sheet material both laterally and transversely.

66. (new) The method as set forth in claim 65, wherein the gathering and capturing step includes engaging the sheet material in an aperture in at least one of the grippers.

67. (new) The method as set forth in claim 65, wherein the gathering and capturing step includes engaging opposite lateral and transverse sides of the sheet material.

68. (new) The method as set forth in claim 65, wherein the moving step includes moving the transversely opposed grippers through a transfer region in longitudinally offset yet paired relation for gripping and advancing the sheet material.

69. (new) The method as set forth in claim 68, wherein the grippers include transversely opposed sets of grippers disposed on opposite transverse sides of the transfer region, and the moving step includes progressively moving the grippers towards one another at an upstream end of the transfer region to narrow the gap and capture the sheet material therein and progressively moving the grippers away from one another at a downstream end of the transfer region to widen the gap and release the sheet material therefrom.